



E-MAIL | JS ONLINE | TMJ4 | WTMJ | WKTI | CNI |
LAKE COUNTRY

WEB
SEARCH



Visit
other



ON WISCONSIN

SHOPS

CLASSIFIEDS

YELLOW PAGES



FILL OUT YOUR GROCERY LIST ONLINE.
DRIVE TO PICK'N SAVE WHILE WE SHOP FOR YOU.
WATCH US LOAD YOUR ORDER INTO YOUR VEHICLE.
GO HOME HAPPY.

SEARCH
ENGINE

GO



ONWISCONSIN LIVE
doing movies arts music
with you

JS Online Features List



News

Wisconsin

Milwaukee

Waukesha

Oz/Wash

Racine

Editorials

Columnists

Obituaries

Letter to Editor

Weather

AP The Wire

Special Features:



Archived Features:



[ON WISCONSIN](#) : [JS ONLINE](#) : [NEWS](#) : [WISCONSIN](#) :

[E-MAIL](#) | [PRINT](#)
THIS STORY

Lake Michigan recedes, tourism dollars ebb

Low level means hardship for Door Peninsula marinas, others

By TOM HELD
of the Journal Sentinel staff

Last Updated: July 7, 2001

Ephraim - A second year of near-record low water levels on Lake Michigan muffled the Fourth of July's economic bang on the Door Peninsula, particularly at marinas left beyond their customers' reach.

There's nothing but water - and shallow water at that - in about half the slips at Kap's Marina on Washington Island. And the water isn't helping owner Bill Krueger recover the \$170,000 he spent last year to dredge the channel into his harbor.

Even dredged, the harbor isn't deep enough for most large sailboats that draw more than 5 feet of water. The Eagle Harbor in Ephraim and the Hi Seas Marina Inc., across Green Bay in Oconto, face the same struggle with low water levels that limit navigation.

Gas prices approaching \$2 a gallon, a slowing economy and lousy June

Door Peninsula



Photo/Ronald M. Overdahl

Ken Blaedon of Brookfield (left to right), Hans Hamm of Delafield and Brian Davis of Texas take advantage of the low water for a walk on Spike Horn Bay. The cove is on Lake Michigan north of Baileys Harbor. The nearly 100-foot-long dock is high and dry.





Need Help?

Searching Archives
Wireless Access
Site Topics
Table of Contents
Contact Staff
Subscriptions

weather also depressed the usually bustling tourism trade up and down the peninsula. Most business owners, though, remain confident that better weather and the recent dip in gas prices will help them rebound as the summer progresses.

Some aren't waiting.

In Dyckesville, a for-sale sign stands outside the All Seasons Marina, along with more than a dozen boats landlocked by low water in the small harbor.

"This isn't panning out," said Jack Little, who works for marina owner Paul Grathen. "It's not any one thing in particular, but it's time to move on."

The narrow, rock-lined channel into the marina is passable only by boats smaller than 17 feet. Fuel sales, equipment sales and repair services all suffered because of the low water the past two years, Little said.

Lowest in 37 years

In late June, Lake Michigan was 20 inches below normal for that time of year, and within a foot of the record low set in 1964. The lake level has dropped about 4 feet since it reached a record high in 1986.

As a result, piers up and down the peninsula give new meaning to the term "dry dock," standing in some cases close to 50 feet from water. The beach in Ephraim has expanded into a mucky, weedy mass, and numerous small boat launches have closed.

In Newport State Park, the receding water carried much of the sand beach with it, leaving sections covered in rock.

The big blow economically, however, has been the inability of boats drawing more than 4 or 5 feet of water to motor or sail into the shallower marinas, crimping neighboring businesses' profits during the moneymaking season.

"It affects everything," said Ellis Mercier, a member of the



Photo/Ronald M. Overdahl

This propeller, dropped off at a Door County repair shop, was damaged when a boat ran aground in Lake Michigan. It was unrepairable.

Quotable

“ It just seems like it's a snowballing thing, and I hope pretty soon it's done gathering speed. ”

**- Bill Krueger,
owner of Kap's
Marina on
Washington Island**

BBC LIGHTING & SUPPLY

Wisconsin's Largest Lighting Showroom

Casablanca Fans
Schonbek Crystals
Stiffel Lamps
Plus:
Antiques and Collectibles

Open seven days a week!
414-933-0808
2015 W. St. Paul Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53224

Wisconsin's Largest Lighting Showroom

BBC LIGHTING & SUPPLY

CLASSIFIEDS

CLASSIFIED

[Jobs](#)
[Cars](#)
[Renting](#)
[Real Estate](#)
[Personals](#)
[Coupons](#)
[Gift Certificates](#)
[Shops](#)
[General Classifieds](#)
[Obits](#)

SUBMIT ADS

[Print Classified](#)
[Print Employment](#)
[Online Employment](#)
[Online Automotive](#)
[Online Yellow Pages](#)
[Advertising Rates](#)

Oconto Harbor Commission. "It costs us a lot of money around here."

Oconto officials are seeking permission from the state Department of Natural Resources to dredge deeper into the harbor, which would open up the navigation channel for the larger sailboats now heading north to Sister Bay. The proposed state budget includes \$386,000 for dredging the Oconto River.

Similar dredging has been done throughout the peninsula, including the Sister Bay Marina, the harbor that serves the Washington Island ferry service and the new marina in Baileys Harbor.

Mercier said the state money for dredging would help all of the businesses that benefit from the boat traffic into the city, including the marinas, restaurants and shops.

That relief can't come soon enough for Pat Krause, who operates the Hi Seas Marina on the Oconto River. Krause said each boat owner renting a slip for a season spends an average of \$2,000 with her business, and the low water level has cost about \$150,000 this year in lost revenue.

"We cut out on a lot of things," Krause said. "You just tighten your belt a little, well, actually, quite a bit."

And on Washington Island, Krueger is certain that other businesses are hurting because of the marinas' struggles.

"I would be lying if I would say that for anybody in Door County business is on an upswing," he said.

Overall tourism down

Along with the low water levels, a downturn in sport and commercial fishing, the cold spring weather and high gas prices all have hurt the tourist business so far this summer.

"It just seems like it's a snowballing thing, and I hope pretty soon it's done gathering speed," Krueger said.

From his outpost off the north end of the peninsula, Krueger does seem to have a more pessimistic view than his neighbors to the south.

Business owners from Baileys Harbor to Washington Island reported that the early tourist season and the Fourth of July holiday were slower than normal, but they were optimistic a

turn in the weather and a strong July and August would bring the season to a profitable conclusion.

Tricia Gipson, a waitress at the Northport Pier Restaurant, firmly cited gas prices as the reason the restaurant near the Washington Island Ferry had served about 600 fewer customers than at this time last year. Now that the prices have dipped to about \$1.40 per gallon, she can see more cars rolling toward her restaurant on their way to the ferry.

And most of the craft shops, berry stands and restaurants will be unaffected by the low lake levels, proprietors said.

The bumper-to-bumper traffic that crept through Sister Bay on Friday afternoon, and the half-hour wait for a table at Al Johnson's Restaurant, signaled business was improving.

"We're back to normal," said Al Fruendt, who owns a collection of shops along state Highway 42 in Sister Bay.

John Cox, who owns the Evergreen Beach Resort in Ephraim, also said the area would rebound from the sluggish start.

"My family has been there 54 years," Cox said. "You have good years and great years; you never have bad years."

Appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on July 8, 2001.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

SEARCH
ENGINE

GO



ONWISCONSIN LIVE
during movies and music
events

JS Online Features List 

© Copyright 2001, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. All rights reserved. Produced by [Journal Interactive](#).